

Historic W.A. Election

Western Australian history was made on 4th February when the first-ever W.A. State election using PR was held for the Legislative Council. Two innovations, for Australia, were the election of an Upper House where all the members are elected for co-incident terms, and terms of members of both Houses being equal.

The W.A. Electoral Commission is to be commended for its excellent multi-colour magazine-style publications, "Proposed Electoral Boundaries" and "Guide to Voting", distributed before the election as supplements to major newspapers. The whole back cover of the latter displayed a very clear and thorough large print 450-word explanation of how the quota-preferential PR count is conducted.

Regrettably the outgoing Upper House insisted on:

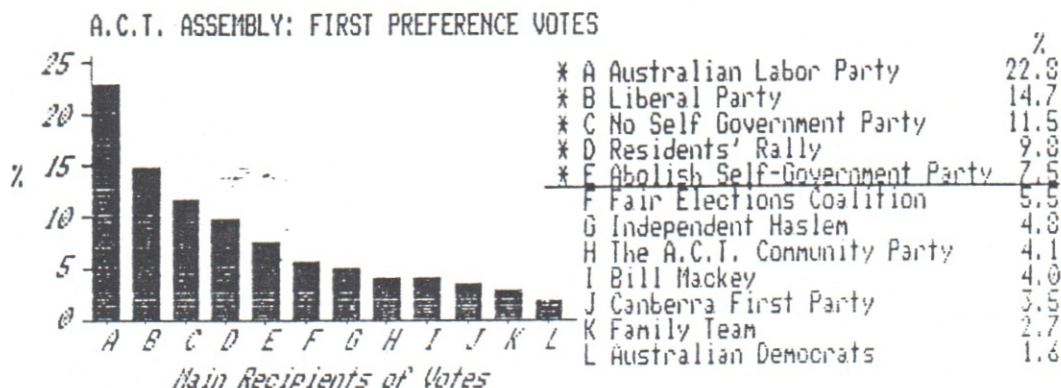
- (a) rejecting the Government proposal to fill casual vacancies by re-examining the quota of votes that elected the vacating candidate, and
- (b) maintaining grossly malapportioned electorates for both Houses.

Ironically, the latter decision benefitted the ALP, which polled well in the small rural electorates, and survived despite an overall non-Labor vote of about 52%. The PR-based Upper House gained a small majority of Liberal and National MLCs, which was a consequence of there being a majority of votes for them.

The Upper House ballot-paper has groups and candidates *both* listed *down* the paper, but the order of candidates' names is stage-managed by the candidates, and is not decided impartially as occurs with Tasmania's "Robson Rotation".

How the A.C.T. Suffered the Pseudo-proportional Machiavellian d'Hondt Scheme

A.C.T. member Bogey Musidlak reports how, on 4th March, the A.C.T. elected its first "self-government" Legislative Assembly: Of the ballot-paper's 139 squares, 22 were party boxes "above the line", leaving 117 squares "below the line" - one for each candidate nominated. Permitting single-candidate "parties", and spreading non-party candidates across the ballot-paper, contributed to its record 1 m width. There were 17 seats to be filled. Latest voting figures were:



Unless the Fair Elections Coalition manages, in counting of postal votes etc., to exceed the barrier of the preliminary exclusion quota (calculated as the quota-preferential quota is), only Groups A to E above* can gain seats. A few first preference votes short can make the difference between a group ("F" here) either winning no seats or winning two seats (since only recipients exceeding that barrier can benefit from others' preferences). This has driven home the absurdity and unfairness of a system noteworthy only for its lack of underlying logic and its tampering with voters' clearly-expressed wishes.

Under the Machiavellian d'Hondt scheme, fully optional preferential voting applied for the first time in the A.C.T. However, each vote was deemed to be cast either for one of the nine independent candidates or, in the case of party candidates, for the party, regardless of whether the first preference mark was placed in the square against the party's name or in a square against one of its candidates' names. Where a first preference was marked in a party box above the line and in a square against a candidate's name below the line, only the marking in the party box was deemed to have been made. That is the reverse of the priority in Senate elections - a subtle shift possible because, unlike Senate elections, there is no Constitutional requirement for a *direct* election.

Once all first preferences are counted, only those parties and independent candidates with more than a Droop quota are eligible for the distribution of seats. Under this flawed scheme, fewer than 17 candidates can be elected in some circumstances, but Senator Richardson dismissed this as a billion-to-one chance not worth worrying about. The papers of excluded parties and independents are eligible for transfer if the voter has marked a further preference for a party or independent that survives the arbitrary initial exclusion, or if a single "1" is deemed to indicate consent to one of the 16 registered voting tickets.

The base totals for surviving parties and independents are then increased, and a provisional d'Hondt distribution is made, in accordance with the highest average number of votes per potential seat to determine the order in which the seats are allocated. Any grouping or independent obtaining the Droop quota must obtain a seat in the provisional distribution. Yet the legislation makes elaborate provision for what just cannot happen, let alone be perhaps only a billion-to-one chance.

In fact, although no independent candidate has survived the 5.556% exclusion barrier at this election, any independent that did would automatically be elected, whether or not any further votes were received at other stages of the scrutiny. Quota-preferential elections recognize the importance of making as many votes as possible fully effective. Under Machiavellian d'Hondt, even though such independents would be mathematically certain of election, they remain eligible for the transfer of further (in effect, wasted) votes. Further dubious features of the transfer rules will be outlined in a future article.

Visit by U.K. Proportionalist to the Queensland Branch

The new President of our Queensland Branch, Mr Stephen Tyler, reports a visit by Mr Harry Ball-Wilson, a former executive member of our multinational parent body, the Electoral Reform Society of Great Britain and Ireland.

Harry told a General Meeting of the Branch that the campaign to introduce quota-preferential PR for the House of Commons was made somewhat harder by some reformers preferring West Germany's arrangement - which, regrettably, has also been favoured by the recent New Zealand Royal Commission for the NZ Parliament. This is reminiscent of Australia's trouble with the d'Hondt pest.

He described how the U.K.'s use of "first-past-the-post" to elect their members to the European Parliament antagonizes the other member states. They use mainly party list PR systems with their relatively even political balance, but the presence of 78 Tories in the UK's representation of 84 imposes an obvious distortion. Fortunately Australia's Constitution avoids that problem. Section 9: *"The Parliament of the Commonwealth may make laws prescribing the method of choosing senators, but so that the method shall be uniform for all the States."*

Harry also mentioned the exception of the U.K.'s use of quota-preferential PR to elect its three representatives from Northern Ireland, in order to reduce discontent from minorities there.

Re-appearance of Blatantly Walk-in Elections?

The NSW Branch's newly appointed Honorary Life Member, Mrs Katie Wright, who is the widow of our late Founding President, Jack Wright, and who was appointed in recognition of her long and valuable work for the Branch, reminded us recently of the widespread tendency, before the introduction of PR for the Senate, for the major parties not to contest, even at General Elections, Lower House seats that were safe for their major opponents.

Mrs Wright explained that PR for the Senate made the major parties realize there was now a regular election covering all States in which a very large majority of the votes cast actually elected people, and it was thus detrimental to them to neglect divisions just because they could rarely expect a majority there.

What are we to make of the decisions this year by the ALP not to contest a by-election for the National-held Victorian Assembly seat of Rodney, and by the ALP and Liberals not to contest the April by-election for the National-held Federal seat of Gwydir? Perhaps it is a partial dropping of the frequent pretence that single member electorates give representation to any more than a majority in any electorate.

The call by the Federal Opposition Leader to avoid "three-cornered" contests in certain Lower House seats shows how easily single member electorate systems can be used to deprive voters of a wide freedom of choice. Multi-member elections with PR under Tasmania's Hare-Clark system give such a fair and wide choice of candidates within parties that there has been less proliferation of parties in Tasmania than in lower houses in many other States (let alone the A.C.T.).

Victorian Branch's Report on the 1988 Victorian Election

Dr Ken Grigg of our Victorian Branch produced a report on the numbers of first preference votes wasted by voters on major party candidates that failed to be elected. The finding that only 39% of first preference votes for Liberal candidates in urban seats elected anybody (cf. 67% for Labor) was one of the features of the report that helped earn it newspaper prominence. - See the clipping overleaf.

Our Example of a Major Weakness in the NRMA Electoral Procedure is Correct

Some readers could not believe our example, in Quota Notes No. 52, of one of the glaring weaknesses in the NRMA's multiple first-past-the-post voting procedure.

The key to our concern is the way in which 5 equal "X" votes prevent voters indicating, and having implemented, any preferences they may have among the candidates. The small-scale example in the table overleaf shows an election with 51 voters, each with 5 "X" votes, and how each voted with his or her "X" votes. The preferences of each voter are shown as the numbers 1 to 5, but for the purposes of multiple "X" voting, each preference is treated merely as an "X".

With that distorting restriction applying, Candidate "F", despite being the first preference of 80% of voters, is defeated by candidates whose *total* first preference support is less than 20%! If that restriction is not applied, Candidate "F" is seen, in the true light, of being the candidate that should be the first to be declared elected, as "F" is the only candidate with a majority of first preference votes.

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System may have cost Libs, NP state election win

By SHAUN CARNEY

The Liberal and National parties might have won the last state election under a proportional-representation voting system, according to a study obtained by "The Age".

The report, by the Proportional Representation Society of Australia, a non-aligned lobby group, used a system of multi-member electoral districts designed especially for the study.

Under this system, Labor and the conservatives stood an even chance of winning a majority. (The system is similar to that used in Tasmania, where each geographical district elects several members rather than smaller geographical districts electing single members.)

The Cain Government proposed the introduction of proportional representation for the Legislative Council in the first half of last year.

In July, the Liberal and National parties rejected such a system on the ground that it would give small parties, like the Democrats, and independents the balance of power.

But the analysis by the Proportional Representation Society shows that the conservative parties' concern about becoming permanently robbed of a majority by the proposed system might have been misplaced.

According to the study, based on votes cast for the Legislative Assembly, both sides would have returned a minimum of 43 candidates to the 88-seat house. The majority would have been determined by the allocation of minor-party preferences.

This is similar to what happened on 1 October, Democrat preferences in several marginal seats, gave Labor a four-seat

majority — 46 seats to the conservatives' 42 seats.

The study also shows that the Democrats would not have gained enough votes to give them a seat in Parliament.

While votes for the Council and Assembly are not directly comparable because more candidates run in the lower house, the study is still a useful guide to how real votes would translate into seats under a proportional-representation voting system.

The analysis shows that under the preferential-voting, single-member electorate system by which the Assembly is elected, a million votes were "wasted" at the election. These were votes cast for candidates who failed.

Under the present system, according to the study, the Liberal Party polled the largest proportion of "wasted" votes (that is, the largest number of votes cast for an unsuccessful candidate of a party). Only 49 per cent of votes for Liberal candidates were effective.

The Labor Party had a vote effectiveness rate of 55 per cent and the Nationals had a rate of 73 per cent. The National Party's high rate, according to the study, came from running candidates predominantly in seats it was certain to win.

But it is in the analysis of metropolitan-area voting that Labor's real grip on the present electoral system is demonstrated. The study shows that Labor's effectiveness rate in urban seats was 67 per cent compared with 39 per cent for the Liberal Party.

The study suggests that this discrepancy between the parties would be rectified under proportional representation, with the percentage of effective votes cast for the Labor and Liberal parties being the same, at 84 per cent.

VOTERS (i)-(l)	CANDIDATES A-F					
	A	B	C	D	E	F
(i)	1	2	3	4	5	
(ii)	5	2	3	4		1
(iii)		2	3	4	5	1
(iv)	5	1	2	3	4	
(v)	4	5	1	2	3	
(vi)	3	4	5	1	2	
(vii)	2	3	4	5	1	
(viii)	2	3	4	5		1
(ix)	3	5	2	4		1
(x)	1	5	3	2	4	
(xi)	4	3	2		5	1
(xii)	5		3	4	2	1
(xiii)	3	2	4		5	1
(xiv)	4	3		5	2	1
(xv)		3	2	4	5	1
(xvi)	5		2	4	3	1
(xvii)	4	3		5	2	1
(xviii)		4	5	2	3	1
(xix)	2		4	5	3	1
(xx)	4	3		5	2	1
(xxi)	3	1	2	5	4	
(xxii)	4	5	3		2	1
(xxiii)		4	3	2	5	1
(xxiv)	3	5	2		4	1
(xxv)	4	5		2	3	1
(xxvi)	4		3	5	2	1
(xxvii)	4	3	5	1	2	
(xxviii)	4	5	3	2		1
(xxix)	2	4	3	5	1	
(xxx)	2	3	4	5		1
(xxxi)		5	3	4	2	1
(xxxii)	4		5	2	3	1
(xxxiii)	5	2		3	4	1
(xxxiv)	4	3	2		5	1
(xxxv)		2	3	4	5	1
(xxxvi)	2		5	4	3	1
(xxxvii)	4	3	5		2	1
(xxxviii)	4	5		3	2	1
(xxxix)	2	3	4	5		1
(xl)	5	4	2	3		1
(xli)		2	3	4	5	1
(xlii)	3		4	2	5	1
(xliii)	4	5	1	3	2	
(xliv)	2	3	4		5	1
(xlv)	5	4	3	2		1
(xlvi)	2	3	5	4		1
(xlvii)		4	5	3	2	1
(xlviii)	5	3	4		2	1
(xlix)	4		5	2	3	1
(l)	2	3		4	5	1
(li)	2	3		5	4	1
NO. OF "X" VOTES	43	43	42	43	43	41
NO. OF NOTIONAL FIRST PREF. VOTES	2	2	2	2	2	41

* NOTE: To calculate this line each of the notional preferences above has to be treated as just an "X".

MULTIPLE "X" VOTING SUPPRESSES NOTIONAL PREFERENCE VOTES - HOW AN 80% VOTE WINNER IS DEFEATED!